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MY SECOND YEAR'S HOLIDAY.

FIRST ARTICLE.

A WILD and seemingly persistent gale from the north-east, drenching showers of rain, with thick mists shrouding the sky and hovering over the turbulent waters of the Firth of Forth. Such was the unaccountable state of the weather at Edinburgh on the morning of Monday the 22d of July of the present year—a season when one might reasonably have reckoned on something like summer and its accustomed sunshine. It was at least under an expectation of this sort that the Commissioners of Northern Light-houses had arranged to start with the *Pharos* steamer, on their annual voyage of inspection. Fixed securely to the pier at Granton, there lay the vessel, primed with coal, and equipped with all manner of stores for bodily comfort, ready for sea at a moment's notice, or, as the captain said—'Only about twenty minutes wanted to get up the steam, sir, and be off' But to think of being off in the face of that resolute north-easter, and its dense fogs and drizzle, was sheer nonsense. The voyage was to be along the eastern coast of Scotland to Orkney and Shetland: light-houses perched on craggy eminences, at which landing can be effected only in fine weather, were to be visited here and there along the whole route. Obviously, the thing was out of the question.

At nine o'clock, when I ought to think of moving, I look out of windows back and front, to see if there be any prospect of clearing. None whatever. The sky all round is inexorably dull—not the faintest break—rain remorseless in its pelting fury. At a loss what to do or think, I am relieved by the entrance of a visitor.

'I have just called to ask your Lordship what is to be done,' said the Secretary of the Commissioners, with a face of extreme perplexity. 'The weather seems hopeless; but, on the other hand, if we don't start, the programme for the different voyages will be inconveniently deranged.'

In this latter view of the case lay the real difficulty. On former occasions, the *Pharos* had taken

the east coast one year, and the west coast another; but now it was considered preferable to inspect the whole light-houses (weather permitting) every year. This was to be effected by three voyages in succession, each with its distinct party of Commissioners; if the first party, therefore, did not keep the prescribed time, there would necessarily be a general and awkward derangement.

'What has usually been done in circumstances of this kind?' I inquired, for I find it a safe thing in official life to go a good deal by precedent.

'Such a thing as detention by weather never occurred before in all my experience,' said the Secretary with a marked degree of astonishment.

'Well, then, you will at once send for Captain Graham to consult with us at eleven o'clock at your office—down with a cab to Granton for him immediately.'

Scene—Office of Northern Lights in George Street, at eleven, Captain, Secretary, and two Commissioners—namely, the Sheriff of Caithness and myself—are in grave consultation, rain still driving furiously outside; hardly anybody to be seen moving about; my horses dripping in meek patience, and perhaps meditating on the comforts of the stable from which they have been ruthlessly dragged that terrible morning.

The resolution come to is, that the *Pharos* must remain *in situ* till to-morrow morning after breakfast; but that, on the chance of the weather moderating, the Commissioners, and the friends who are to accompany them, must be on board to-day in time for dinner. A wise determination, worthy to be followed in all similar circumstances. It was not the less judicious, that not even next day, nor next again, did the wind, rain, and fog abate, during which protracted period, what could the luckless Commissioners do but make themselves as comfortable as possible? They were enjoying life at sea, with the peculiar advantage of lying tranquilly in harbour, and receiving the visits of acquaintances.

On Thursday, the weather shews symptoms of mending. The captain, who for three days has been examining the aneroid barometer in the chart-room every ten minutes, reports that there is at

last a slight movement in the right direction ; and further, that the commander of the *St Magnus*, which has just arrived from Lerwick, communicates the cheering intelligence that he left Bressay Sound basking in sunshine. Hopes of a speedy departure rise high on board the *Pharos*. Captain and mate think we may venture to cast off at four o'clock in the afternoon, when we shall be helped by the tide. As commodore—for to this maritime honour I had been promoted by the Commissioners—I sanction the order for departure accordingly. Stores, a little impaired by recent proceedings, are reinvigorated by fresh importations. Things are decidedly looking up.

The delay, which had been manfully borne by the Commissioners for three mortal days by dint of such services as could be rendered by the cook and steward's departments, had proved to me a special benefit. I was able to do some business in the interval which I could not complacently have left undone. Up till the last available minute, I was occupied with a public ceremonial at the High School ; and rushing away from this pleasant academic demonstration, I was just in time to reach the *Pharos*, when the loud rustling of the spare steam plainly indicated that everything was at length ready for departure down the still troubled Firth.

A few notes, written from memory, will explain what followed.

Thursday, July 25.—*Pharos* is let loose at 4.15 P.M. A lady, wife of one of the Commissioners, having bidden good-bye, waits to see the vessel leave the harbour. Interested in Shetland, her last words, patriotically cried to us from the pier, are : 'Mind to go to Scalloway ; try to see Foulah.' 'Ay, ay'—handkerchiefs are mutually waved, till increasing distance and the dull creeping haze obscure the shore, from which we are rapidly separated. It is cold ; some turn in. I call the Commissioners together and resolve on line of route. All agree that, in consequence of the loss of time, as well as the state of the weather, it is advisable to abandon that part of the programme which refers to the visiting of St Abb's Head, the Bell Rock, and light-houses along the coast of the mainland. There is nothing now for it but to drive right on to Shetland.

This resolution was contrary to ordinary practice, for the rule, as formerly stated by me, is, to anchor every evening in a quiet bay, previous to sitting down to dinner. Nor is this a very unreasonable arrangement. The Commissioners are not paid officials. They consist of certain state-officers, sheriffs of counties which border on the sea, with some civic magistrates, all of whom give their services gratuitously as regards the national light-house system ; and considering their frequent attendance at meetings, as well as the other work they perform, it would be rather too bad to expect that, in their annual inspections, they should make the unbecoming sacrifice of sailing night and day. I entirely coincide in the propriety of not beginning to make any

noise on board before six, and not starting before seven o'clock in the morning—of 'doing' not more than two or three light-houses in the day (which is quite enough, as some of them are more than two hundred steps high, with steep ladders at top) ; and of casting anchor in a sheltered haven for the night. These primary rules are to be invaded only on some particular emergency, as on the present occasion. On and on, accordingly, did the vessel drive in its course, passing in the dusk the Bell Rock light-house, which blazed forth in solitary grandeur over the waste of tumbling waters—

A ruddy gem of changeful light,
Bound on the dusky brow of night.

Friday, July 26.—Gale and mist still continue. The *Pharos*, which is a capital sea-boat, broad in the beam, and can do ten miles an hour to a nicety, goes pushing busily on all day out of sight of land. There is an ugly twisting sea, which causes a kind of mixture of rolling and pitching, not easy to put up with. One or two have a touch of the *mal de mer*. It is so cold, that there is little walking on deck. Along with the tried hands, I won't give in, and, to set a good example, make a point of attending all the meals, of which I introduce a new one—coffee to be on the table every morning at seven, for those who get up early, and who wish to take something before the *grand déjeuner* at nine. This novelty highly approved of.

Towards the close of day it is announced that Fair Isle is in view. We forthwith run upon deck wrapped in cloaks, and there to be sure is seen the first of the Shetland group, lying at the distance of several miles. It is a high rocky island, but we do not distinguish more than its outlines, and we have no time to pay it a visit. This I regret, for Fair Isle possesses some historical, if not social, interest. It was in this remote island that one of the ships of the Spanish Armada was wrecked, in the attempt to escape northwards in 1588, and from the Spaniards who were thus thrown on the hospitality of the natives was derived that taste for dyeing knitted woollen articles for which the island has ever since been noted. The colours employed are blue, yellow, and red in different tints, such as are seen in the woollen productions of Cadiz, and figures of the Maltese cross are usually blended in the patterns. Fair Isle was lately sold to a new proprietor ; but such, I am told, is the poverty of the inhabitants, that the purchase is probably not of a very enviable kind.

Somewhat later, we see Foulah, a huge mass, situated far in the distance on the western horizon, under the golden light of the setting sun ; and when darkness approaches, we have before us the loftily-perched light-house of Sumburgh Head. The light is one we are to visit ; but meanwhile, it must be passed. On the outlook, the keepers are aware of our proximity, and hoist their flag, which is faintly observed fluttering in the night-breeze at the summit of the cliff. Some miles further we have yet to go, skirting the eastern side of the mainland of Shetland. Not until about ten o'clock does the *Pharos* round to the left into Levenwick Bay, and drop anchor, after a run of thirty hours from Granton. All at once, the grinding

noise of the engine ceases. We are in profound quiet. The relief to the sensations is immense.

Saturday, July 27.—Up steam, and off at seven, and again on our travels northwards. The first object of interest that comes in our way is Noss Head, a bold and lofty precipice, upwards of six hundred feet high, and against the base of which the sea eternally rages, scooping out the lower and more friable strata, so as to cause great caverns and strangely shaped stacks. One of the largest of the detached masses was formerly reached by adventurous fowlers being drawn in a basket along a cord at the top of the cliff; but the 'cradle of Noss,' as this aerial machine was termed, has been given up, not only on account of its danger, but as being too attractive to crowds of strangers who were troublesome to the farmer of the adjoining lands. We had a capital sight of this magnificent headland from the deck of the *Pharos*, which approaching to within a distance of a hundred yards, paused in its course for about a quarter of an hour, to enable us to realise the imposing grandeur of the scene. The reddish-coloured strata formed long and narrow shelves, rising tier above tier, on which sat myriads of white sea-fowl in regular rows, looking out placidly on the ocean. To discompose their deliberations, the two brass guns belonging to the vessel were loaded with powder, and fired cliffward one after the other. The astonishment must have been bewildering to these dwellers of the rocks, for immediately they filled the air so thickly as to have the appearance of a shower of snow. Off the whole winged their flight tumultuously eastward, and, for anything I know, they did not recover their equanimity, or stop in their headlong course, till they reached the coast of Norway.

It may be supposed that the weather had somewhat cleared up to permit of this manoeuvre; certainly, the drizzle and fog had vanished, and the wind was lulled, but the sea continued to roll on in angry surges, and it was not a little mortifying to have to pass the light-house at Whalsay Skerries about noon without being able to effect a landing.

Again the Commissioners meet to consult as to proceedings, and it is thought expedient to seek a harbourage in Balta Sound, in North Unst, east anchor, and remain over Sunday. The Sound, I was told, is a land-locked bay, and as tranquil as a pond; which information proved correct. The vessel steamed quietly to its moorings. All around was a bleak country, rising to hills of moderate height; no trees, and few enclosures of any kind, with huts of the humble thatched type, such as one sees in Skye and other western islands. We recognise two houses, built in proper style, and slated. One of them, Bunes, the residence of Mr Edmonstone, the udaller or proprietor of this hyperborean domain, is a neat mansion of dark stone, with a lawn spreading down to the shore of the inlet, and a pier, at which small vessels may draw up.

It being still early in the day, there were projects of excursioning. Boats were ordered to be lowered, and every one could do as he liked. The greater number were inclined for a walk across the hilly ground to Burra Fiord, to visit the dwelling-houses of the keepers who are connected with the light-house on the sea-girt rock at the northern extremity of Unst. The distance to the station was said to be three miles, others declared it to be good four miles, and this word good, I

could gather, meant at least a mile more. Leaving the more adventurous to undertake this ramble of somewhat undefinable extent, I chose to land with the Secretary and one of the Commissioners, for the purpose of paying our respects to the udaller of Bunes, and asking him on board to dinner.

This was my first landing in Shetland. The scene was bleak, and the air as thin and chilly as might have been expected so near the sixty-first degree of north latitude. It was at this spot that Biot, the eminent French astronomer, resided in 1817, to make observations on the English arc of meridian, and determine the figure of the earth by the action of the pendulum. An upright stone, with an inscription, is pointed out as that to which his apparatus was attached. There was something pleasing in the idea that the place, with all its wildness, had been selected for an important scientific experiment. The late Mr Edmonstone, uncle of the present worthy udaller, in whose time Biot paid his memorable visit, must have been a man of no ordinary kind. One of his fancies was so profound an admiration of the late Duke of Wellington, that he travelled all the way from Unst to London to see him, and, honoured with an interview, he became a favoured correspondent of the Duke. The present Mr Edmonstone entertained us with an account of this incident in the family history, and shewed us a bundle of carefully preserved letters, written in the characteristic and well-known 'Field-marshal' style.

After a chat with Mr and Mrs Edmonstone, we walked out to see the surroundings, and get a notion of the state of vegetation. I remark that trees are very much wanting for the sake of shelter, and the udaller, who has a laudable taste for improvement, points dolorously to the thin, withered shanks of some infant ashes and firs which he had planted within the walled policy. 'All dead,' I observe, with the proper degree of sympathy; 'but there is an artifice in planting trees. In order to get them to grow, you need to plant them close to each other, for the sake of mutual shelter and warmth; thin planting is worse than useless.' The udaller did not undervalue this hint; but, by way of practical answer, conducted us to a walled garden to notice the whimsicalities of a Shetland climate. The garden possessed a few apple and other trees, but not one of them shewed a green leaf above the top of the wall, the upper parts exposed to the blasts from the sea being scorched into the condition of a scavenger's broom. It passed through my mind that a single barrel of American apples would be ten times more to the purpose than all the fruit which could possibly be produced in Hialland.

All were on board in time to dress for dinner at half-past six, at which hour the udaller came alongside in his boat, and was ceremoniously received on the quarter-deck. As we were to have a guest of this distinction, everything was ordered to be in the best style. One of the privileges of the commodore is to settle the bill of fare, and prescribe the wines and liqueurs that are to be used. After some cogitation with the steward on these important particulars, I issued the following *menu*: Mock turtle-soup, salmon, fillets of haddocks, dressed calf's-head, curried chicken, corned beef, greengage tart, cabinet-pudding, and savoury omelette; which, considering that we were lying in a northern voe fully three hundred miles from shops, was not bad. With the wine, walnuts, and other trifles on the

table, and Philip as a faithful Ganymede ministerially at call, things went so merrily on that the early troubles of the week were forgotten. A facetious Commissioner told his drollest stories; another sang the *Bonnie House of Airlie* with uncommon dramatic effect; other melodists obligingly contributed to the general amusement; and from the udaller we received innumerable particulars concerning the state of affairs in Unst, the furthest north portion of the British islands.

W. C.

MARRIED WELL.

IN NINETEEN CHAPTERS.

CHAPTER I.—A PROPOSAL.

'Tis 'a mad world, my masters;' and a very good thing, too, for some of us. What writers, both serious and gay, dry and humorous, would do if everybody were religious, moral, refined, and grammatical, Heaven only knows: your essayist, your novelist, your humorist, your satirist, owe more than they would be willing to allow to those who commit breaches of the laws of their nation, their morality, their religion, and their grammar; have a deep debt of gratitude to pay to the criminal and the ignoramus. Lunatics, too, are a great assistance to some people. A lunatic, for instance, was a great assistance to the late Mrs Finch. If Mrs Finch dressed in fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day, she was indebted for it to a lunatic: a lunatic was El Dorado to her. Mrs Finch's husband had served his country in a certain subordinate position; and so well and faithfully did he perform his duties, that his grateful superiors came to the conclusion he was the right man in the right place; and so impressed were they with this fact, that they could not find it in their hearts to remove him: rather than do so, they promoted younger men over his head, paid him ever so many compliments, and ever so few sovereigns. But, valuable as he was, the day came when his place must be filled up, for Death claimed him, and his superiors were obliged to part with him. Now, the consequence of his having had no promotion was, that he left his wife with a daughter and no means of livelihood. Howbeit, a grateful country allowed Mrs Finch a pension of fifty pounds a year—after much application on her part—and Nelly Finch, the daughter, had twenty pounds a year, which had been left to her by a distant relation. But, inasmuch as seventy pounds a year have been discovered by experience to be far from enough to enable an elderly lady and a young lady to live in a manner which accords with ladyship, Mrs Finch was obliged (to use a popular phrase) to 'look about her.' She looked about her a long while without being able to see anything except cold shoulders. But one day a very different sight presented itself, coming, as it very often does come, in the shape of a doctor of medicine: in fact, it was a warm-hearted friend, whose only obligation to Mrs Finch was, that he had attended her husband without fee. Says he: 'My dear Mrs Finch, I have a proposition to make to you.'

'What is it, doctor?'

'Now, you mustn't be alarmed: it is, that you should take charge of a lunatic patient of mine.'

'Good gracious! doctor, why, I should be frightened out of my life.'

'Stuff. Let me feel your pulse: you've nerve

enough, even if it were required; but it isn't: the poor soul I allude to is not more dangerous than an infant: she is stark mad, no doubt, but in a very inoffensive way. She has only one crotchet, and if you humour her on that point, she is as gentle, kind, and simple as anything can be.'

'What is her crotchet, doctor?'

'Well, poor thing, she's under the impression she is St Cecilia; and really she has some grounds for it. She has never been married, her name is Cecilia, and she was always fond of music.'

'But how could I possibly humour her in such an idea as that? It seems likely to lead to great profanity.'

'Nothing of the kind, my dear madam, I assure you. It is one of the most singular things connected with her hallucination, that she draws no inferences from it. She merely fancies every now and then that there is a halo round her head (sometimes she extemporises one with a few yards of yellow tissue-paper); and if you pretend to see it, and make a very deep obeisance to her whenever she alludes to it, she is perfectly satisfied, the illusion vanishes, and she becomes what you might almost term reasonable, if she were not so childish. She is in very good circumstances, and her friends would be willing to pay you a hundred guineas a year. Besides which, you would, of course, be at no expense for household matters: you would live entirely with Miss Ewart, manage her domestic affairs, and be in every respect a member of her family.'

'I couldn't part from Nelly, doctor,' said Mrs Finch hesitatingly.

'Oh, there would be no occasion for that; I have made every arrangement necessary for your continuing to have Nelly with you. Miss Ewart is very fond of young people, and will be delighted with your daughter, I am sure. Now, what do you say?'

'What can I say, doctor, except that you are the kindest and most considerate of friends, and that I will accept your offer thankfully.'

'That's right,' said the doctor cheerfully. 'You've taken a great weight off my mind; for I'm quite certain you will be very comfortable with my poor patient, and my poor patient will have the best of guardians.'

So Dr Snell went away, looking as gratified as if he had performed a wonderful cure; and so, indeed, he had, after a fashion: he had cleverly 'ministered to a mind diseased'; he had stopped the ravages of motherly anxiety; he had removed a heartache from a widow's breast; and he inhaled his snuff with joyous prodigality. He rolled off in his brougham to three different houses; and when he arrived at his own home in Savile Row, he had managed everything which was requisite for Mrs Finch's removal to Miss Ewart's.

CHAPTER II.—WADSWORTH HOUSE.

In a very few days, then, Mrs Finch and her daughter found themselves domesticated at Wadsworth House, Upper Crampton, and soon became as sister and niece respectively to poor Miss Ewart. Dr Snell's account of his patient was perfectly correct. She was the most simple-minded, confiding, affectionate creature in the world; she was pleased with nearly everything and nearly everybody; she thought it was so kind of her relations to manage her affairs for her; she thought it was

so good of Dr Snell to look after her health so attentively; she thought it was so considerate of Her Majesty to send a couple of gentlemen to call upon her twice a year or so to see that she was quite comfortable; and she often expressed her amazement that such charming persons as Mrs Finch and Nelly, fitted as they were to adorn any society, should condescend to share her home, look after her domestic concerns, and study her humours, for the paltry consideration of a hundred guineas a year.

'You dear,' she used to say to Mrs Finch, whose face she kissed, and whose ear she pinched, 'I don't know what I should do without you and Nelly: I should certainly get into the debtors' jail, for accounts I never could manage, and I verily believe I should go stark mad.'

The last remark she would make with such a look of horror, and with such a simple air of evident belief that it was the very last evil in the world which could possibly come upon her, that Nelly, who was not by any means unsusceptible of the ludicrous, could with difficulty restrain her laughter, and Mrs Finch was in mortal terror lest Nelly should burst out, and infuriate the amiable lunatic.

But even when Nelly did, as on one or two occasions she did, indulge in a peal of silvery merriment, Miss Ewart, far from being infuriated, was wont to say: 'Come here, you darling, and kiss me. Your laugh is not only kind, as shewing how absurd you feel it (though I can assure you some people don't—think of that, my dear—ha, ha, ha!) that I should hint at my going mad; but it reminds me of music I often hear in my day-dreams (for I have many day-dreams); and your voice is so soft, and sweet, and enchanting, that I only regret my habits prevent my getting young fellows about you. You would draw them on—but not, I'm sure, to shipwreck—as the Lorelei did the mariners.' And then Miss Ewart would quote from Heine's *Lorelei*, for she was tolerably accomplished, understood and spoke a little both German and French, and played and sang with considerable taste, using perhaps a little more pedal than Masters in Lunacy would consider necessary, and occasionally finishing a shake with an unearthly shriek and a shout of laughter, for which there were no directions in Italian upon the music pages.

Such was poor Miss Ewart, whom Mrs Finch and daughter found not only useful, as a gold and silver mine, but also lovable; whose carriage enabled them to make quite a stately appearance in 'the drive' and elsewhere, for Miss Ewart was as sane to look at as any dowager-duchess in Hyde Park; who gave little or no trouble; and whose house was open to any friends of Mrs Finch. For, although Miss Ewart gave and went to no parties, rose in the morning and retired to rest in the evening early (shewing herself thereby to be in some points less insane than her neighbours), and led a very quiet and healthful life, yet she paid and received a few visits, and begged Mrs Finch to follow her example. Moreover, she was so desirous to 'give the young fellows who were not fools a chance' (as she said), that she omitted no opportunity of sending Nelly to parties. She put her carriage at Nelly's disposal, got some elderly lady to be Nelly's chaperon, and was sometimes very nearly angry because Mrs Finch refused to accompany Nelly. But Mrs Finch was a conscientious woman, and

would not neglect her duty, which she understood from Dr Snell was to constantly keep an eye upon Miss Ewart. It was all very well for Miss Ewart's old confidential maid to say: 'Doe go, mum; doe, that's a dear. Lor, I can manage the por lamb; she ain't no trouble.' Mrs Finch persistently declined, making all sorts of ingenious excuses, verging upon untruth, for her refusal to quit Miss Ewart.

CHAPTER III.—IN ROBE AND CROWN.

Now it happened one morning after Nelly had been to a dance, that Miss Ewart at breakfast began, after her fashion, to catechise Nelly, saying: 'Well, dear, you look more charming than ever this morning: did you meet anybody in particular last night?'

'Yes,' answered Nelly; 'I did, and he sent his love to you.'

Miss Ewart flushed, and—

'My dear Ellen,' remonstrated Mrs Finch in horror; but she was interrupted by Miss Ewart, who said sternly: 'I like to see you in good spirits, my dear, and perfectly unconstrained here; but I will not be treated with disrespect.'

'Dear Miss Ewart,' replied Nelly earnestly, 'he did indeed—he said his name was George Ewart, and that he was your nephew.'

'George!' exclaimed Miss Ewart. 'Ah! that is a very different thing. I beg your pardon, dear, for imagining you could be rude; but I haven't seen the good-for-nothing boy for ages'—

'So he said,' broke in Nelly, looking demure; 'and he told me to say, that he was quite ashamed of himself, and that he intended to call in a day or two to see you. He expressed himself as quite grateful to me for having reminded him (by my presence, you know—of course I knew nothing of him, and it was only when he heard that I was with you, he said, that his conscience smote him) of his shortcomings.'

'Indeed!' observed Miss Ewart smiling. 'Well, I always thought George had sense; and I think, if I were a young man of sense, and I heard that you were living with an aunt of mine, whom I had neglected for ages, I should be conscience-stricken, and call upon her immediately.'

And so George did. He didn't wait even the day or two he had spoken of; but that very morning, when breakfast had not been very long over, when Miss Ewart was taking her morning walk in her garden and adjoining field, was visiting her pets, and plaguing her gardener and coachman (after her kind) with innumerable inquiries—when Mrs Finch was busy with domestic affairs, and when Nelly was 'practising' in the drawing-room, the drawing-room door was suddenly opened, and Mr George Ewart was announced. So there he was with Nelly alone, and Nelly had to entertain him until his aunt and Mrs Finch could come to him. He took the proffered chair, and

More amazed

Than if seven men had set upon him, saw
The maiden

sitting on the music-stool. He wondered that he had considered it a dull morning as he came along; it was true there was no sun, but sunlight appeared to him of no consequence with such a bright presence to chase away the gloom. When she lifted her eyes, two stars from heaven shone on him;

when she opened her lips to speak, the air seemed full of musical sounds; and when she trilled her liquid laugh, his very heart danced with delight. Two dainty ears peeped from beneath her wavy hair, and, though she wore no earring, it was plain to him they had been pierced. He pondered who could have had the heart to do it—some woman, he was sure; no man could have done it, and he thought corporal punishment would have been justifiable even in the case of the woman. But as a sweet dream, in which you are floating upon a cloud, and are having a *tête-à-tête* with the Queen of Beauty, is suddenly broken off by a knocking of knuckles against a wooden door, and by a shrill cry of, 'Eight o'clock, sir, and yer 'ot water!' so Mr George Ewart's interview with Nelly was cut short by the turning of the handle of the drawing-room door, and by the unwelcome words: 'Please, sir, missus 'll see yer in 'er own room.' George saluted Nelly, and reluctantly followed his informant. Close to the door of Miss Ewart's boudoir stood Mrs Finch, who, bowing to George, whispered: 'She has put the halo on—I suppose you know how to behave?' George nodded. Mrs Finch opened the door, and both having made a deep obeisance, stood upon the threshold, and beheld a strange sight. Miss Ewart was seated upon a high velvet-covered seat, before a desk, upon which stood a large mirror. On either side, a little in advance of the mirror, was a huge silver candlestick, with seven branches, each having inserted in it a large wax-candle. Miss Ewart was dressed in a long robe of gauzy material, covered with gilt stars; upon the top of her head she wore a diadem of silver stars; and round her head, lengthwise, reaching from the crown of her head to her shoulders, there had been rolled a voluminous mass of yellow tissue-paper, which she called the 'halo.' Her hands were crossed upon her bosom, and she was gazing at herself with a smirk of satisfaction in the mirror. At the appearance of Mrs Finch and George, she assumed a haughty air, gave them a stately recognition of their obeisances, and then cried out joyfully: 'Why, I declare that's George. How do you do, George? Come here and sit at my feet on this footstool.'

George advanced with obeisances, and seated himself; upon which she patted his head, and said in a loud whisper: 'Who am I, George?'

'St Ce'—began George; but she interrupted him with: 'H'sh—sh; don't speak it out loud; I don't want everybody to know it. But what brings you here, George, on my fête-day?'

'To do homage'—began George; but she broke in with: 'To me? You lie, George—you know you lie; you always did lie as a boy—didn't you, George?'

'You are pleased to say so,' answered George humbly.

'O yes,' she continued, 'you did. But enough of that. You see, this being my fête-day, I can't have common visitors. I expect the invisible company almost immediately, and so you must go now, and come another day, and that good woman there, who ministers to me, shall provide for you properly. Now go!'

George made his obeisance, and retired (backwards); but just as he reached the door, Miss Ewart called out: 'Come the day after to-morrow, George, and then you shall have dinner with me and that good woman, and that good woman's daughter; and whatever you do, George, don't tell lies. Now go.'

George went without seeing any more of Nelly, and as he went, he thought that though his poor aunt seemed to be more 'cracked' than ever, she shewed some reason in accusing him of having been at least on the point of telling a lie. And perhaps, in after-days, his poor aunt's words came back to his memory; in after-days, when he gazed upon the worn face of her whom he had vowed 'to love and to cherish;' then, perhaps, a still small voice said unto him in the tones of long ago: 'You always did lie as a boy, didn't you, George?'

CHAPTER IV.—THE GAME OF BOB-CHERRY.

Well, if 'to-morrow never comes,' nevertheless 'the day after to-morrow' came, and George was by no means punctual—that is to say, he arrived long before he was expected, or even wanted; and if he had hoped to gain anything by that, he must have been sadly disappointed; for the moment he was announced, his aunt, and Mrs Finch, and Nelly all went up-stairs to dress, and Nelly came down last. Not that she was last dressed; on the contrary, she was first; but instead of coming down, she took up a book, and glanced alternately at its pages and out of the window into the garden, where Mr George Ewart paced gloomily about, and half unconsciously, his wish being father to his thoughts, whistled *Come into the Garden, Maud*—Maud being, under the circumstances, short for Nelly. Whether Nelly heard his tune, was never known for certain; but as she every now and then laughed heartily (though the book she held in her hand was of a very serious character), from time to time shook her head, and once uttered, in the sweetest tones, the not very ladylike expression: 'Don't you wish you may get it, sir?' people can draw their own conclusions. Thus, Mr George Ewart was, to borrow an expression from the Greek tragedians, 'sold;' and thus properly did Fate deal with him who thought to steal an advantage by being too soon. *In tempore ad eam veni, quod rerum omnium est primum*, says the authority; and yet Mr George Ewart was fool enough to surprise Nelly before she was 'fit to be seen;' so Nelly paid him out by making him stroll about the garden alone until he became quite sulky. She knew, moreover, by the instinct which has been given to all daughters of Eve, how great a stimulant is judicious withdrawal; how sweet to the dog is the morsel which has been held a while beyond his jumping powers; how delicious in the mouth of the boy is the fruit he bites in the tantalising game of bob-cherry. Nelly, therefore, was the last to descend; but when she saw, from George Ewart's face, that the game of bob-cherry had been carried almost so far as to create the feeling which results from hope deferred, she determined to console him with a little nibble.

'What have you been doing with yourself all the time, Mr Ewart?' she asked, as if her window did not look out on the garden, or as if her sweet eyes were without the gift of sight.

'Taking a stroll in the grounds,' answered he, a little sulkily. 'It is a very good thing to do just before dinner, and I think you would have liked it.'

'Have you really?' exclaimed Miss Artful Innocence. 'I should have enjoyed it so very much,' and she looked, 'under the circumstances,' at him; so that his heart was greatly cheered, and though he had just before been longing for sherry and bitters, he now felt able, had he been called

upon, to 'drink up Esil, eat a crocodile,' without anything artificial to whet his appetite.

The dinner went off merrily; and at dessert, Miss Ewart grew quite facetious.

'I will trouble you for the nut-crackers, George,' said she, 'when you have done with them. Not now, not now, child; you are only half-cracked; when you are quite cracked—not before. You know they say some of our family have been cracked, and perhaps you will be some day; but I must say you have seemed to me lately to display more good sense than I gave you credit for.' And she looked significantly at Nelly.

'Are you going to the dance at the Mortons'?' asked George of Nelly.

'N-n-no—I believe not,' answered she with some hesitation.

'Yes, you are, my love,' interposed Miss Ewart vehemently. 'As this dear, dutiful, obstinate mamma of yours will not go with you, I have arranged with Mrs Platt, who sent me a note just before dinner to say she will be delighted to take you with her daughters, bring you back, and watch over you as a daughter. And she is a very nice woman, and knows what she is about; she has daughters of her own, and treats them with proper consideration; she is a mother, and not a dragon.—Are you going, George?'

'Of course I am,' said George quickly.

'Why of course, pray?' asked his aunt with feigned surprise.

'Well, because they've asked me,' replied George a little petulantly.

'That does not seem to me a good reason,' rejoined his aunt. 'You were always a capital hand at inventing excuses for not going where you did not wish to go, and I have heard you say the Mortons' parties were a simple nuisance.'

'I've changed my mind,' said George brusquely; whereupon his aunt rose, and after her, Mrs Finch and Nelly. They left the room, and George to wine and solitude. But George, that evening, shewed little inclination to linger over his wine; he displayed an unwonted predilection for tea; and his aunt remarked that it was the first time she had ever seen him 'turn over the leaves.' But then Nelly played and sang; and, besides, George was the only man present, so he couldn't very well help it.

That night, George was particularly dull on one point; could not take the broadest hints; heard the bell ring, and saw bedroom candles brought as if he heard and saw not; and at last was fairly turned out of the house.

But the Mortons' party would come off in a few days, and his guiding-star would shine again.

Meanwhile, no aunt, however sane, received such attention from a nephew as Miss Ewart from George. But, at whatever time he called, he did not see Nelly: the game of bob-cherry was in full play.

CHAPTER V.—WILL YOU MARRY ME, MY PRETTY MAID?

The beauty of bob-cherry is, that the fruit is continually hovering over your lips, if it do not drop into your mouth; it may seem to be a long while away from you, but it comes bobbing towards you at last to a certainty. So the Mortons' party brought Nelly bobbing towards George Ewart. They had already danced once together, when there entered the room a new-comer. He was about

twenty-one years of age; he was neither tall nor short; he had a deep chest and an elegant figure; he held well up his shapely, oval face; and the light was favourable to his wavy brown hair, and to his eyes of grayish blue. Nelly started and changed colour; and George said: 'Why, there's Sidestroke Jim.'

'Oh, you know him, do you?' remarked Nelly.

'Of course I do,' said George; 'he was at our college. But—but—do you know him, Miss Finch?'

'I have met him occasionally,' answered Nelly; 'but I knew him as Mr James Fortress.'

'That is his name,' rejoined George; 'but we always called him Sidestroke Jim at our college, because he always played billiards with a tremendous side: I daresay you don't know what that means?'

'No, I do not,' rejoined Nelly, and had no time for more, as Mr Fortress made towards her, was greeted graciously, responded deferentially, and exchanged with George a friendly 'Hollo! old fellow, how d'ye do?' He was accepted by Miss Finch as her next partner, and in the meanwhile, had leisure to notice how good an understanding prevailed between Nelly and George. He began to look a little vexed, and he thought within himself: 'Confound that fellow! I believe she likes him.' But when George saw the temporary flush on Nelly's face as she was led off by Fortress for the promised dance, the sprightliness with which she moved, and the animation with which she talked, George's soul was stirred to its inmost depths; he felt in turn what Fortress had felt, and almost said aloud to himself: 'Confound the fellow! I'm sure she likes him.' But George did not know of what even a very young woman is capable. He was not aware that she can admire, and yet dread; try to please, and yet shun; feel triumphant at being wooed by, and yet choose rather to die than marry the same person.

Later on, however, in the night, he had heard, as he passed a cool conservatory, whither partners retired for ice and conversation, a few words, spoken in a subdued but distinct and audible tone, which startled and at the same time relieved, if they did not enlighten his mind.

'Never!' asked a man's deep voice with an accent of agony—'could you never marry me?'

'Never!' replied a girl's soft voice, as musical, plaintive, compassionate, and yet peremptory as that of an angel announcing hopeless perdition.

'Then to-night I must say good-bye for ever,' said the first voice; 'and may God bless you—and—and me.'

George moved hurriedly away, not wishing to be a hearer longer than was inevitable, and therefore he knew nothing more than that the man who had been refused was Fortress; for he was familiar with the voice of Sidestroke Jim. He would have admired Fortress, had he seen how he bore his fate; how he tried to hide his one convulsive sob; how he forbore for a while to look towards Nelly; and how courteously but sadly, after a few moments' silence, he rose up and said: 'Of course, we must return together: will you do me the honour of taking my arm?' And George would have pardoned Nelly the half-repentant sigh with which she, pale as marble, and sorrowful-looking as a suppliant, took the offered arm, and stole back to the dancers.

Motherly Mrs Platt saw at a glance there was something amiss, but merely said: 'My love, you

look dreadfully tired, and I am sure I am, and want to get home.—I will take care of Miss Finch, Mr Fortress, if you will kindly send my daughters to me, and tell them the carriage is waiting.—I ordered it,' she continued, turning to Nelly, as Fortress went his way, 'twenty minutes ago, and it is nearly half-past two then.'

The daughters were in due time brought up smiling, and vainly entreating for a little more delay, by two stalwart, handsome fellows; but Fortress appeared no more, and George Ewart acted as Nelly's esquire. George, conscious of what he had overheard, felt a little confused; Nelly, unconscious of what he had overheard, thought his behaviour strange: he said but very few words, and was very clumsy about the arrangement of her shawl.

'You are very awkward to-night, Mr Ewart,' said she with assumed gaiety and real petulance.

'Very,' acquiesced George, and added ruefully, 'and I fear I shall be worse to-morrow.'

'Why to-morrow?'

'I shall have a little speech to make.'

'I should like to hear it.'

'You shall.'

But George did not make his little speech on the morrow; and Nelly had much to hear and to suffer before he did.

CHAPTER VI.—WHAT A NIGHT MAY BRING FORTH.

Meanwhile, the demon that rules over lunatics had been enjoying great sport at Wadsworth House. Miss Ewart had complained of fatigue, and gone to bed before ten o'clock. Before eleven, the old confidential maid had brought Mrs Finch word that the 'poor dear' was fast asleep, and had been told by Mrs Finch to go to bed, as Mrs Finch would herself sit up for Miss Ellen.

Mrs Finch sat down-stairs in all the confidence of security, for the 'poor dear' always had her candle removed as soon as she was asleep, and the confidential maid had brought down the candle to Mrs Finch. Moreover, the door which led from Miss Ewart's bedroom into her boudoir was always locked after she had gone to bed, and the key was given to Mrs Finch, so that the 'poor dear' could not get at the wax-candles which stood on either side of the mirror. But whilst Mrs Finch sat and read and waited for Nelly, a strange scene was being enacted up-stairs.

No sooner had the confidential maid's bedroom door been closed and locked, than Miss Ewart rose from her bed, groped her way to the boudoir-door, opened it, felt her way to the mantel-piece, seized the lucifers, struck one, and lighted all the candles. Her face wore the look of delight which a boy assumes when he has made an April fool. 'The old idiot!' she chuckled. 'I saw directly she had forgotten to turn the key; and that poor, dear, good Mrs Finch doesn't dream of such a thing. Nelly, I hope, is turning young men's heads; and now I shall have what I have waited for so long—solitary converse with heavenly beings without the intrusion of flesh and blood.' She donned her robe of gauze, her diadem, and her 'halo'; she took her seat upon the velvet-covered throne, crossed her hands upon her bosom, gazed steadfastly into the mirror, and smirked and gibbered with satisfaction. After a while, a deep sleep fell upon her, her head dropped forward upon the desk, and the flames of the candles flickered round the 'halo.'

Still Mrs Finch sat and read, and waited for Nelly; but morning would dawn ere Nelly came.

Mrs Platt and her daughters, as they were driven towards home, slept the sleep of the tired but happy; Nelly kept the vigil of the weary and sad. It was June; and as she gazed vacantly through the window, and watched the dawning of the day, she saw a strange appearance in the sky. There was a reddish hue unlike the blush of summer morning, and it was not in the direction of the rising sun. Her heart was troubled; and when the carriage stopped suddenly, and James descended from his seat beside the coachman, and approached the window with his finger on his hat-brim, she had scarcely power to lower the window, scarcely voice to ask: 'What is it, James?'

'Please, miss, there's a fire.'

'Where, James? Oh, where?'

'Please, miss, Thomas say it can't be very fur from Miss Ewart's, miss.'

Up started Mrs Platt, whom the sudden stopping of the carriage had awakened, and came to Nelly's assistance: 'Tell Thomas to drive as fast as ever he can to Miss Ewart's,' she said; and taking Nelly's cold hand, she continued: 'Don't be alarmed, my love: it may not be far from Miss Ewart's, but still it may be far enough.'

Thomas faithfully obeyed orders: the carriage flew along the road; the Misses Platt woke up and screamed; Mrs Platt explained matters to them; and Nelly sat quite still with her white face buried in her hands. It was not many minutes before the roar of a multitude enjoying a spectacle was heard; soon the regular see-saw booming of the fire-engines fell upon the ear; the carriage was brought to a sudden stand-still; and the peremptory voice of a policeman cried: 'You can't come along here with that trap; you must go round another way.'

Mrs Platt got out, and had a few moments' conversation with the policeman; then she got in again, looking deadly pale, but quite collected, and putting her hand upon Nelly's knee, said calmly, gently, and affectionately: 'You must come home with me, darling.'

Nelly shivered, but could not speak. After a long silence, she asked: 'What have they done with dear mamma? And where has poor Miss Ewart gone?'

'The policeman,' answered Mrs Platt with a quivering lip, 'knew nothing for certain but that the house is a ruin.'

'Did—did—all escape?' asked Nelly in a whisper. 'Oh, tell me, did all escape?'

'Hush! my dear; here we are at home, and in a very short time we shall know everything.'

On the threshold stood Dr Snell, looking more cheerful than people ever do, except when there is every reason to look otherwise. He helped Nelly out of the carriage with the overdone gaiety of a criminal who is determined to die game, and said: 'Now, you mustn't look so scared, little bird; you must run up to Mrs Platt's room at once; and then she and I will come and answer any questions you have to ask.'

And as Nelly moved slowly and dreamily away, he turned to Mrs Platt, took both her hands in his, and in a voice from which cheerfulness had suddenly vanished, said: 'My dear Mrs Platt, do you know what has happened?'

Mrs Platt, who had ordered both her daughters

to their rooms, told him the result of her conversation with the policeman.

'The man's account was quite true,' said the doctor; 'and now, my God! what is to be done with that poor girl?'

'You and I, doctor, must do our best, and some one else will aid and bless us. But there is no time to be lost, or the poor child will go herself to seek for her mother.'

So Mrs Platt and Dr Snell went to perform a joint operation, not much less painful to the operators than to the victim, an operation of which the anguish is proof against chloroform and any anæsthetic. Let us close the door upon them, and learn from what follows the meaning of the one heart-rending cry, the violent ringing of a bell, the careful tread of light-footed maids, the brief utterances of subdued voices, and the piteous moaning that continued till noon.

Noon had arrived, and George Ewart was still sitting in his lodgings with breakfast untasted beside him, his elbows on his knees, his face hidden by his two hands, and the newspaper of the day on the floor at his feet. One could read at a distance, even as the paper lay, the huge letters announcing, 'Awful Fire in the Suburbs: an Insane Lady and her Keeper burned to Death.' We need not wade through the column of details; we know now the story poor Nelly had to hear, and why George Ewart's 'little speech' had to be postponed, at anyrate for a season.

Fortress also had read the shocking news; and for hours he sat in his chambers pondering, and his spirit whispered over and over a mournful dirge with the same monotonous burden, 'O that she had bidden me hope last night; but now we have said good-bye for ever.'

HOW WE CATCH OUR LEECHES.

OUR Australian cousins, it appears, now claim to be admitted among the happy people who catch their own leeches; nay, catch enough to bleed not only themselves, but many other communities besides. If the calculation be true, that a leech swallows five times his own weight of the blood of his victim at each suction, and causes as much more to flow without being swallowed, why, then, a country which boasts of its millions of leeches every year has rather a sanguinary career to answer for.

A strange creature is the leech. It loves a humid, but not exactly an aquatic mode of existence; it must have both air and water, but neither need be very pure; and when it goes to bed at night, it is *not* in the water. It makes its appearance most conspicuously in fine summer weather, hides in bad weather, and buries itself deep in the mud and ooze during frost. Leeches are very impartial in their selection of enemies, for they will attack any animal, and suck him to death if he does not get rid of them. On one occasion, a lizard eight inches long was thrown into a leech-pond; very soon he was covered with leeches, and in no long time afterwards nothing was left of him but the skeleton. A frog will sometimes leap out of a ditch covered with leeches; if he can get rid of them by rolling in the dust,

well; if not, they kill him as sure as fate. They attack everything which their teeth will penetrate, and find out the tender parts of everything that has life. Sometimes a frog is so completely covered with them that there is not room for all; the late comers attack the rest, and suck *their* blood. It is believed that weak, sick, and wounded leeches are killed by the others—therein supporting the Darwinian theory of the struggle for existence, and the popular adage about the weakest going to the wall. If an unlucky animal swallows a leech as food, which sometimes happens, he is fed upon, instead of being the feeder, unless he masticates or otherwise kills the black individual first.

A strange trade is that of catching leeches, and a most unlovely one, for, owing to certain peculiarities of the matter, it is literally blood for blood. Our English leeches are mostly found in Norfolk, Suffolk, Essex, and Kent, principally in the first-named county, where the *broads*, or shallow stagnant pools, are favourable to their existence. They are caught in the spring and summer by men who wade into the pools with naked legs; the leeches cling to the legs, and suck away; the men pick them off as fast as they see them, and put them into bags. Sometimes, by beating the surface of the water with poles, the men can entice the leeches up, and so catch them: a good time for doing this is said to be just before a thunder-storm.

It is in France, however, that the leech-fishery is carried on much more extensively than in England. La Brenne is the head-quarters. 'If ever you pass through La Brenne,' says the *Gazette des Hôpitaux*, 'you will see a man pale and straight-haired, with a woollen cap on his head, and his legs and arms naked. He walks along the borders of a marsh, among the spots left dry by the surrounding waters, but particularly wherever the vegetation tends to preserve the subjacent soil undisturbed. This man is a leech-fisher. To see him from a distance, his woebegone aspect, his hollow eyes, his livid lips, his singular gestures, you would take him for a patient who had left his sick-bed in a fit of delirium. If you observe him every now and then raising his legs, and examining them one after the other, you might suppose him a fool; but he is an intelligent leech-fisher. The leeches attach themselves to his legs and feet as he moves among their haunts. He feels their presence from their bite, and gathers them as they cluster about the roots of the bulrushes and seaweeds, or beneath the stones covered with green and gluey moss.'

This leech-fishing is quite a trade. Sometimes a man will catch twelve dozen in four hours; by which time, however, he is pretty well knocked up with having so many sanguinary creatures pegging away at him. Occasionally, in the spring, a piece of meat is put into the water, to attract the leeches to one spot. In summer, the leeches retire into deeper water, and then the men fairly strip, and wade in up to their chins; or else they sit on a raft, and let their naked legs dangle in the water. Although La Brenne is the head-

quarters, all the marshes, or *marais*, on the west coast of France furnish leeches. They are most abundant after high tides, the explanation being, that they shun salt water. The right of fishing belongs to the communes, to persons who farm it, or to individuals, according to circumstances. A very customary plan is to farm or rent a leech-marsh at an annual rental. As great heat, great cold, and high wind cause the leeches to hide themselves, the fishery depends much on the weather, and is consequently precarious. The fisher does not purposely allow the animals to fasten upon his naked legs; sometimes he catches hold of them just as he sees them about to attack him; sometimes the leeches will condescend to visit him even though he wear flannel or serge leggings; and occasionally they are so numerous that a good catch may be made even when his nether limbs are encased in cloth trousers. The men gradually acquire a knowledge of spots where the leeches collect in masses—in the mud, in the roots of trees, in rank grass, and in holes which they make for themselves. The fishers are mostly wanderers, leading a sort of gipsy-life. They are anything, however, but the 'merry gipsy' of song, and story, and opera; for their trade is really a horrid one, condemning them to stagnant waters, foggy mists, and fetid odours. They are often attacked by ague, catarrh, and rheumatism; and if they indulge in strong drinks to keep off the noxious influences, they suffer for it in the end by disorders of other kinds.

The leeches go through many hands before they reach Dr Bleed'em and Mr Pill'em. When the fishers return from their strange fishing-ground, they empty the leeches (from the linen bags which have been tied round the men's waists) into tubs of clean water, where they are kept forty-eight hours. The creatures give forth a quantity of blackish-green matter; and the steeping is continued until this is ended. If to be sent at once by land-carriage, or to be placed in *dépôt*, they are drained dry upon a sieve or strainer, then put into bags, and then hung up in a dry, airy place. They require further washing from time to time, to remove a kind of frothy exudation. Neither in summer nor in winter can they safely be packed moist. Before the days of railways, the wagoners who brought the leeches to Paris were wont to stop every alternate day at certain places, where facilities were provided for turning out the leeches into tubs of fresh water, to wash and refresh them, and to pick out the dead and weak. In hot and humid weather, this was necessary every day; but possibly, in these railway times, the transit is managed with sufficient quickness to render this midway process unnecessary. Small parcels are sent by mail or by diligence; but larger quantities are sent in wagons fitted up for the purpose. The leeches, when clean and moderately dry, are placed in linen bags, seven or eight pounds to a bag; the bags are large enough to leave the leeches room to move about, and are tied round quite close to the mouth. A hundred or more of such bags are placed on shelves in a wagon, well packed round with dry rye-straw; and access of fresh air to the shelves is needed in hot weather. In winter, the bags are put into boxes stuffed with hay. When leeches are to be sent by sea, they are placed in tubs half-filled with prepared clay or

mud, and covered with linen, wire-gauze, or perforated zinc. During the voyage, they are frequently examined, with a view to the removal of the sick and dead, who generally wriggle their way up to the surface. Many circumstances determine the amount of sickness and fatality among them. If the state of affairs looks very serious, all the healthy leeches are taken out, and thrown into tubs of new mud; water is poured into the tubs, which contain alike the healthy and the unhealthy, until the mud is brought almost to a liquid state: after straining and washing, the healthy leeches, nursed up to a clean and comfortable condition, are removed to their new mud-homes, there to wriggle about at pleasure.

Paris is a great market for leeches, doing a considerable trade in these black people every year, and sending forth the means of drawing any amount of honest blood. Italy and Spain at one time sent great supplies; but those countries have become exhausted by too much fishing—leeches, like salmon and oysters, requiring to be coaxed and protected during the spawning season. The south-eastern parts of Europe, especially near the mouths of the Danube, are prolific in leeches; and it is said that leeches to the value of three million francs are exported from Trieste every year. Poland and Russia are also leech-countries, but the supply in them and in most European countries scarcely meets the demand. When leeches arrive from various quarters at Paris, if not sold directly, they are kept in reservoirs, and taken out as wanted. At one large establishment at Gentilly, there are reservoirs about fifty feet long by thirty wide, the bottom made of fat, unctuous clay; water is kept in them to the depth of two feet, stagnant or flowing according as may be needed. In these reservoirs are placed the leeches, who collect at night in a vegetation of marshy herbage, which lines the sides and part of the bottom. They are kept in these reservoirs during the summer months, from April to October. In winter, they are put into very deep trenches, having a hard, stony bottom, covered by a layer of clay-mud a foot or two in thickness, and provided with a thick thatch to keep out rain and frost. The leeches from some countries seem to love clean water better than dirty; while others, for reasons best known to themselves, manifest a decided hankering after mud. Persons who farm the fisheries usually sell the leeches by weight; but the merchants who thus buy them sell by number; and thus the latter have an interest in selecting small rather than large leeches. With the retail dealers, however, this is not the case; a large leech brings a better price than a small one. There are about seven hundred average leeches to a pound: most families know something about the price of a leech, and to them it will thus become evident that a pound of these very uncomfortable-looking creatures is worth something considerable.

Australia, as we have said, has lately entered the lists as a leech-producing, leech-fishing country. Large numbers of these creatures are sent to Paris and London, where they are said to have a favourable character among medical men. America, however, presents the best market, owing to the great scarcity of leeches in that country. The Murray River Company expect soon to have a trade of two to three million leeches per year. The Viceroy of Egypt, that same Ismael Pacha who has recently paid us a visit, has granted a concession

to a speculator who gathers three million leeches a year from the shallow waters left by the periodical inundations of the Nile. These Egyptian three millions and the Australian three millions will come in aid of the European supply; and if we are not bled to our hearts' content in future, it will be strange indeed.

ONE OF THE FAMILY.

CHAPTER XL.—MRS MORKE.

If the 'situation' in which we left Mrs Morke and her visitor was striking even to melodrama, the *dramatis personæ* were commonplace enough. Of Mr Ernest Woodford we know sufficient to acquit him of any suspicion of the heroic; and the lady who now stands opposite to him, with her hand upon her beating heart, has as little Romance about her as he. She is stout and fair, with scanty flaxen curls, such as the cheaper sort of dolls wear; her pink eyes are small, and very narrow at the corners, and with the frightened look which we now read in them, she reminds us exceedingly of a guinea-pig. The one positively good expression which she ordinarily possesses is Harmlessness. 'Weak, but good-natured,' would be the verdict that would usually be passed upon her by the charitable observer; but, like the animal to which we have ventured to compare her, 'she has a kick in her' too, and she is at this moment striking out. For almost a minute, she stands irresolute, with her little eyes riveted upon the intruder, in terrified fascination, and feeling behind her for the handle of the door, as though she would have escaped by flight; but presently the blood which forsook her cheeks returns, her cream-coloured complexion thickens, and her tight brow is puckered up with a frown.

'How dare you come here?' cries she. 'Did you not pass your word never to molest me more? I say nothing about your own self-imposed and solemn oath, but did you not make me that promise, Mr Woodford?'

'Yes, Clementina, I did.'

'I beg you will not call me Clementina, sir.—So you confess you have broken your promise, do you? A pretty gentleman you are! My noble father always warned me how it would be: "Once ally yourself with trade, and you may bid good-bye to honour," were his very words. The scutcheon of the Ballygaboolies has been sufficiently smirched, I should have thought, without this further persecution.'

'She is even a greater idiot than she used to be,' muttered Mr Woodford beneath his breath; but he answered her humbly enough: 'I have that excuse to offer, Clementina, which no woman should treat with scorn—I find it is impossible to live without you.'

'You lie, sir!' she replied. It was a curious speech to come from those indecisive lips, but they snapped it out quick as sparks. 'Have I been your wife for two long years, not to know better than that! Was I necessary to your existence for a single hour? Did you not treat me—and suffer her to treat me—as though I were a nonentity;

a piece of furniture; me, the mistress of your house! Did a day, a meal-time pass, without some slight being put upon me by yourself, some insult by her? Can I ever forget it, think you? Can I ever forgive it, Ernest Woodford? Never!'

It was surprising to see how her passion ennobled this poor creature. Although her voice rose beyond its proper compass, and grew harsh and cracked, and her ears as well as countenance glowed like unhealthy beetroot, the genuine sense of wrong redeemed all such external drawbacks, and gave her words both strength and pathos.

'Look you,' she went on; 'I did not seek your hand, sir, but you mine. You were rich, it is true; but you were low-born and vulgar—as you are now, and as you always will be to your dying day. I was poor, but I was a lady. That pedigree—yes, you may sneer, but you would give half your wealth to come of such a stock—that pedigree, sir, was weighed against your purse. If I had chanced to have borne you offspring, you would have been more proud to think that those children had noble blood in their veins than that they would inherit your gold. But since you were disappointed of this, you meanly visited your spite on me; nay, more, you suffered that vile woman also, whom you yourself despised, to vent her spleen upon me. Perhaps I could have pardoned all besides, but I hated you for that, sir, and I hate you now.'

He put up his hand, as though in mitigation of such direful words; but the flood-gates of her pent-up rage were opened, and she could not perhaps have stayed its current even if she would.

'A woman must be foully wronged indeed, sir, ere she casts away her husband's name, as I have yours; though not so much, indeed, because you bore it, as because your sister did. A woman must be conscious of her blamelessness, when, after having fled her husband's roof, she comes to dwell in the very place from which he took her, among old friends. They address me by my maiden title, sir, one and all; they ignore, from a delicacy which you cannot comprehend, the events of those two years I passed in bondage, with your sister for a jailer; and I will add, that had you sent up your card, with that hateful name of Woodford on it, you would have escaped these home-truths to which you have now to listen, for I would never have consented to see your face.'

Here she paused for breath (but not at all for words, albeit she was a woman by nature both slow and scant of speech); and Mr Woodford, pale as death, made answer with forced calmness: 'Madam—Mistress Morke, if you will have it so—although your reason for rejecting my poor name is scarcely valid, since my sister no longer bears it'—

'Is she dead?' interrupted the other with sudden vehemence. 'If such news as that has indeed brought you hither, Ernest Woodford, I can forgive your coming.'

'She is not dead, Clementina—she is married.'

'Married? Impossible! You are deceiving me.'

'Indeed, I am not. Here is proof of what I say, and of much more.' Mr Woodford stepped forward, and placing in his wife's hand the pencilled note which had been the immediate cause of his visit, watched her narrowly while she read it.

'So this woman has a child,' said Mrs Morke in low but grating tones. 'Remembering her treatment of your nephew and niece, Ernest, I pity her babe. And she sneers at you, her brother,

because you are without an heir. You must have parted on bad terms.'

'We did so. She expressed her gratification when poor Charlie died—the boy you were so kind to, Clementina—and I told her what I had long had in my mind about her. She warned me at that time not to come hither or seek any reconciliation with you. That is what first set me thinking about it.'

'Ah!'

Mr Woodford's remark was not strictly complimentary, but the other did not take it at all in dudgeon; on the contrary, her reply had a certain smack of satisfaction about it that is rarely comprised in a monosyllable. 'Ah!' repeated she, 'it did, did it? And now, when she writes to say that your wealth is, as it were bespoken, certain to fall into the hands of Selina's son as soon as you are dead, and taunts you with your childlessness—I can read in your face how the barb rankles. So, then, if I—your wife—should consent to return to you, there would be no such certainty for this hateful woman: anxiety and fear would gnaw her heart.'

'Would gnaw whatever substitute nature has appointed for that organ,' assented Mr Woodford grimly. 'Your sagacity saves me a world of explanation, Clementina. How I hate her! you don't know *how* I hate her!' and the speaker slowly turned his swarthy hands one over the other, like some malevolent Eastern mute who had received an esteemed order for wholesale strangulation.

'Pooh, pooh!' answered Mrs Morke; 'you love her.'

Ernest Woodford strove to smile, but his lips declined their office, and only shewed his glistening teeth.

'You love her, I say, in comparison with hate like mine. You do not know, you cannot guess, what I have to avenge! You will repent of this scheme of yours, even yet. You will not be able to stand the ridicule of society, although you have endured my contempt to-day with a forbearance which (considering what your temper is) has really done you credit.'

'She told me that I would never bear with either, Clementina, and therefore I have endured the one, and will ignore the other. Besides—if you really think of doing me this favour—at Sandalwaite, nobody knows that I have ever been married. It is a place entirely secluded, and out of the way of all gossips.—Not dull, you know,' added Mr Woodford hastily, as Mrs Morke cast rather a desponding glance at her *moire antique*, trimmed in the latest fashion—not dull, like Seidlitzville, but quiet; and the society exceedingly select: county families—ahem—clergy, and a medical gentleman of great intelligence and skill. You will be considered, of course, to be a bride.'

A gleam of topaz-light illumined Mrs Morke's pink eyes. She had been a bride already, and the experience had not been satisfactory; but the illusion is one of which a woman is not easily disenchanting, or we should not have so many manumitted widows submitting to the yoke a second time. Ernest Woodford saw his advantage, and pressed it eagerly.

'Clementina, I swear to you that if I have anything to forget with respect to our married life, except my own ill-conduct, it is forgotten. The person who caused our disagreements, or, at all

events, ceaselessly strove to foment them, has now exhibited herself in her true colours. If you would only try me—if you would but consent to cancel that deed of separation'—

'Make no rash promises, Ernest,' interposed Mrs Woodford gravely. 'Forgive me if the past has rendered me somewhat incredulous. I will suppose, however, that if I acceded to your request, I shall at least be mistress in my own house; and I do not seek gaiety. I have lived here so retired a life, and that in a place where, as you well know, I was once'—

'Honoured, adored,' exclaimed Mr Woodford hastily: 'yes, that is very true.'

'Where I was once, at all events, much sought after, Ernest,' continued Mrs Woodford, unconsciously assuming for an instant the *pose* in which she had long ago been painted by Chalks, R.A. (as the Nymph at the [chalybeate] Spring). Then once more relapsing into melancholy, she added: 'You do not know *how* lonely I have been here: worse, far worse than any widow, for I had not even the sad solace of the remembrance of past kindness.'

'Forgive me, Clementina,' cried her husband, hiding his eyes in his hand, perhaps, like the painter of old, from want of confidence in his own powers of expressing the sublimer feelings.

He heard her silk dress coming towards him, and felt her palm placed lightly upon his shoulder, and yet he did not lift his eyes.

'You are ashamed of yourself, Ernest,' said she quietly. 'I cannot say that you ought not to be so; but that is enough. I will be your wife once more.'

'Clementina,' cried he, taking her hand in his, and making as though he would salute her lips, 'you are too good! How shall I ever shew my gratitude for this!'

'I am not good, Ernest,' returned she, neither encouraging, nor disengaging herself from, his embrace; 'and you may prove your gratitude very easily.'

'By doing what—only say what?' replied her husband with eagerness.

'By sitting down at once to write to your sister: the London post does not go out for half-an-hour: she will then receive the news of our reconciliation by breakfast-time to-morrow.'

'Give me pen and paper, Clementina,' answered Mr Woodford grimly: 'they say "bitters" sharpens the stomach; and Selina shall certainly have that appetiser for her morning meal.'

CHAPTER XII.—A CHAPTER THAT MAY BE CALLED INTERESTING.

We often hear it somewhat needlessly asserted that seemingly impassive persons are capable of feeling, and do feel, the touch of sorrow as much and as deeply (even more deeply, it is unjustly added) as the Impulsive and Demonstrative. Without doubt, they do; and the foolish pride that causes them to hide their grief, not seldom drives it to seek an outlet by unusual and even hurtful channels. Nature compels from us obedience to her laws, and exacts her dues to the uttermost in whatever kind we pay them. The Spartan boy was bitten by the fox, notwithstanding that he managed to wear a stoical countenance, and he would probably not have suffered nearly so much if he had indulged in a good cry. Ernest Woodford and his wife were both of that reserved and secretive class who seem to have been born to live

in a world of their own without sympathy with their fellow-creatures; but they were not insensible, as we have seen, to insult. When such persons consent to live together, they generally fall out, as these did; but when they agree, or have become reconciled, they form a very dangerous pair. Their mutual society blunts still more their dull susceptibilities; they remove one another further and farther from their fellow-creatures day by day; so that at last all that concerns their relatives (for friends they have none) with respect to them is the question of, 'Who shall be heir?' The unhappy couple, conscious that this is the case, become sometimes haters of their kin and kind.

Again, one of the necessary consequences of deep-rooted selfishness and egotism is our ignorance of the world; those who never consult the feelings of others, at length are unable even to imagine them; and so Mr Woodford, who rather prided himself on detecting the baser motives that actuated his fellows, was in reality less capable of judging human nature aright than the impressionable little Evy, his niece of ten years old. His notion, for example, that the fact of his previous marriage was not known in Sandalhtwaite, was a most ridiculous one; not a grown-up person in the parish was ignorant that the Black Squire had once had a wife, who had fled his roof; some said by reason of his own brutality, and others on account of the persecutions of Miss Selina. The injured lady had never publicly sued for a divorce; but the details of the separation had been canvassed at the *Wrestlers' Arms*, and talked over in every statesman's kitchen within ten miles of Dewbank Hall, again and again. Though Mr Woodford had put almost the whole length of England between his first and second home, and had left all his servants in the south, and had enjoined, not without success, the strictest silence on the subject upon the members of his family, all his neighbours knew his story; for if a bird of the air will carry the matter to a rich man's ear that we speak against him in our private chamber, there are, on the other hand, whole flocks of carrier-pigeons to tell the world what the rich man does; and they often start with the intelligence even before he has done it.

The mirth, therefore, was general, although concealed, throughout Sandalhtwaite, when Mr Woodford, after due delay, brought home his wife to Dewbank Hall as his newly-selected bride. Even if other things had been favourable, he was himself incapable of carrying out such an imposture. It is embarrassing enough to be taking one's legitimate honeymoon; but to pretend to take it with a lady to whom one has been in the habit of expressing one's opinion without reserve for a couple of years, is an impersonation demanding great resources, and especially the most perfect command of temper. Although, however, Mr Ernest Woodford broke down most completely in this difficult part, the select audience invited to witness the performance expressed no adverse criticism. It consisted, indeed, mainly and almost solely of Dr Herbert Warton, who was now a more frequent guest at the Hall than ever. The bond that had reunited his host and hostess in some measure connected him with themselves. The fact was, this poor gentleman had had it in his mind at one time to marry Selina Woodford; and although his love for her had not turned to hate, simply because it had never had any existence, he *did* hate her, inasmuch as she had bestowed the four thousand pounds, of

which he stood so much in need, upon somebody else. That somebody, too, was a man who had called himself his friend, and had often expressed in his presence contempt and even disgust towards the lady in question. True, Dr Warton had not discouraged his depreciatory remarks, and had even contributed to them some severities of his own, but only with the modest purpose of appropriating to himself the more fascinating painter's leavings. He deemed it base in Claude Murphy that he should have allied himself with a woman about whom he had spoken so scornfully, notwithstanding that he himself had had the intention of doing the very same thing; for there was not, he argued, the excuse for the other that there was for him. True, Claude Murphy had an income which he found very inadequate to his expenses; but Herbert Warton's means were even more limited, and besides, he was deeply in debt. The Painter loved pleasure; but with the doctor, pleasure, or rather such freedom from painful reflection as liquor could insure, had become absolutely necessary. The mere good-for-nothing takes his ruin pretty kindly; a fool from the first, he gets to be something of a philosopher at the last, and dies in his ditch, if not decently, at least without malignity; but the man of parts, who has neglected his opportunities, and knows it—who is constantly comparing the thing he is with what he might have been, but for his own folly—gnashes his teeth in the unmoved face of Fate, and takes his punishment with rage at heart, a mutineer ready to set light to the magazine, and blow the whole ship's company out of the water, notwithstanding that he himself makes one of the crew. Dr Warton's malice was, as has been said, at present directed against the Murphies. If 'friendships made in wine' are easily dissolved, so are those cemented over gin and water, and (notwithstanding that the painter had generally paid for the liquor) Dr Warton hated Claude far more than his wife. At the Woodfords' table, however, he gave the lady the preference in the matter of vituperation. Little Evy, although she had no cause to love her aunt Selina, sat aghast as she listened to the things that were said by her three companions against the absent Selina. She served for a topic of abuse for almost a twelvemonth, and then disappeared from the conversation with what, to Evy, seemed an extraordinary suddenness—although Uncle Ernest still indulged in vituperative soliloquy.

The child could not account for this, but it excited her wonder. Grown-up folks little know what questions they give rise to in the heart of a child-companion. It is often observed—as though there were something curious in it—that children are great observers, and it is only natural that such should be the case. Shut out, for the most part, from interchange of ideas with their elders, their sharp little wits are not inactive: there is no other employment save that of observation for them. We are apt to imagine that, after having said more than we intended in the presence of a child, we can reverse the undesirable impression by a pretence of pleasantry, or, at all events, by an explanation suitable to their capacity; but we might just as well hope to erase a sentence in black ink by writing another beneath it in red. The difference between our earnest and our jest, our mistake and its apology, is quite as marked. Evy's great eyes rolled as wonderingly at not hearing Aunt Selina abused, as they had at first

when listening to the recital of her misdeeds. Perhaps some reconciliation had been effected: perhaps Aunt Clementina (whose arrival had been the signal for these protracted invectives) had forgiven her sister-in-law at last. When people were rather unwell, as when Uncle Ernest had the gout, for instance, they were cross and extramalevolent; but when they were very ill, and perhaps a little afraid of dying, they grew more charitable. And certainly Aunt Clementina was seriously indisposed. Evy would have been sorry for that, in any case, for the sweetness of her nature was such, that she used to be sorry even when Miss Selina's biliousness assumed such abnormal proportions that it prevented her from persecuting the household by confining her to her bed; but Mrs Woodford, in her uninterested, lethargic way, was really kind to Evy. Moreover, the child remembered that she had been good to Charlie in the old times—the days that had been placed so far asunder from the present by the great divider, Death. She recollected how Mrs Woodford had once secretly given him his dinner, when her husband and Aunt Selina would, upon very insufficient grounds, have deprived him of that meal. She remembered her patting his brown curls approvingly, on more than one occasion, and telling him to be a gentleman and a soldier like his father before him—advice which had pleased the poor boy hugely. She called to mind with what tenderness Mrs Woodford had spoken to them both—they little knew it was her farewell—on the eve of the day she left Uncle Ernest's roof, as was then thought, for ever. 'You have always been my little friends,' she said, 'the only friends I have had in this house. When you grow up, Charlie, and marry your "little wife" here, be sure you treat her kindly: a man that is cruel to his wife is a fool as well as a scoundrel. And you, Evy, thank your stars that your husband has no sister; you two have a chance of being all in all to one another. May you grow up gentleman and gentlewoman, as you bid fair to do. God bless you, my dears. Good-night.'

There was no pathos of this sort about Mrs Woodford now, nor indeed was there much cause for it. Uncle Ernest and she had no such quarrels as used to take place, nor, on the other hand, was there much show of affection between them. Now, however, when, as has been said, Mrs Woodford became unwell, it seemed to Evy that her uncle was very solicitous about his wife. She rarely, if ever, came down to breakfast, and her face was pale and anxious. Dr Warton came every day, and prescribed for her, or gave directions about her diet, or ordered or forbade her taking exercise: walking he pronounced to be bad for her; and Uncle Ernest, so far from making any objection to such a piece of extravagance (as might have been expected), himself volunteered to procure her a pony-carriage, in which Evy often accompanied her alone in drives about the parish, although never beyond it. On these occasions, the child noticed her aunt to have grown of late quite popular (which her coldness of manner had hitherto precluded), since every woman she stopped to speak with had a smile for her, and a glance which, though her little companion could not comprehend, certainly expressed kindness and congratulation. Mrs Woodford spoke scarcely anything in reply, and even her answering smiles were forced, and were replaced the instant that the necessity for

their exhibition ceased, by a look of pain and care. She was more silent even than usual after any of these well-meant but certainly unwelcome salutations, and the frequency of their recurrence quite embarrassed her sensitive little companion. But what was a more serious source of annoyance to Evy in these drives was the predilection of her aunt for the long winding cart-track—really quite unfit for her dapper little vehicle to traverse—that led up to Ander Nook. It was painful to her to watch the pony toiling up the ascent with his heavy load, for Mrs Woodford never left her seat, and the absence of the child's slight figure was but small relief to the poor beast; and it was extremely distasteful to her to have to be civil to 'Mary Harrison that was' at the end of the journey.

Mary Harrison, in spite of the promise we heard her give at the Wishing-gate, had become Mrs Ripson very shortly after her uncle's death had made her mistress of the farm; and Evy, young as she was, felt all a woman's contempt for such heartless conduct. George Adams, her lost Charlie's friend and hers, had, it was well known, been very cruelly treated by this romantic but disloyal young person. He had left his profession, and returned to Sandalhtwaite upon her sole account, only to find her the bride of his rival. He had taken the blow very quietly, but those who knew him best were of opinion that he did not feel it the less. His native cheerfulness and elasticity had quite disappeared; the wrestling-green knew him no more, nor did the little inn echo to his jovial song; but he worked early and late at the wad-mine, wherein he gave every satisfaction, as deputy-overlooker. His previous calling and habits of discipline well qualified him for such a post, and he was by nature accurate and diligent; but the desire of forgetting the past was the true spur that goaded him to exertion. His eagerness for work was quite painful to witness to everybody but his employer, Mr Ernest Woodford, who devoutly wished that all his miners—a somewhat turbulent and uncertain set—might be crossed in love with the same satisfactory results.

What Aunt Clementina could have to say to the woman who had made George so miserable, Evy could not imagine; but that it was something of a private and important nature was certain. They made no scruple about leaving her alone in the great kitchen until every leaf and flower of the old oak-chest grew familiar to her gaze, while they held together their hushed talk in the little room in which old Harrison no longer murmured at his bedridden fate. She knew nothing of the subject of their conversation, but from the disconnected words which were borne now and again to her ear, she gathered that her aunt and Mary Ripson were of one mind concerning the matter in debate, but were thwarted by some third person, whose opposition they were scheming to overcome.

Had not George Adams been such a favourite with Evelyn Sefton, her tender heart would have been touched to see the change that had taken place in the woman that had deceived him, since her marriage with his rival. Her russet-red but comely face was grown quite pale and pinched; her coral lips had lost their brilliancy; her hazel eyes, though looking even larger than before, were no longer bright, and were set in sunken hollows. Her voice, in particular, had exchanged its rich full

music for low and hesitating tones. That 'will of her own,' of which her poor old uncle used to complain, not altogether without cause, no more existed; it was swallowed up, like one of Pharaoh's serpents, by Miles Ripson's will, which was far stronger. The high-spirited village queen had become a bondswoman. Just at present, however, there was a physical cause for her ill looks; she was seriously ailing; and it was to convey comforts to her—wine, and jellies, and soup—that the head of Mrs Woodford's pony was so often turned in the direction of Ander Nook. Such luxuries had not been known at the hill-farm at any time, and were still less likely to be found there now, when every shilling that its present tenant could lay his fingers on was spent in selfish dissipation.

Always an idle dog, Miles no sooner found himself in possession of his wife's little property, the 'tying up' of which her uncle had procrastinated, after the manner of his class, until it was too late, than he had begun to spend it with both hands. It was enough to make the old man turn in his grave, said the neighbours, to see how his hard-earned hoard was kicked down by this young profligate during the first twelvemonth of his married life. His humble employment as a wad-miner was of course discarded at once, but without that of a farmer being exchanged for it: Miles had played the gentleman at large, or at least the rôle which seemed to him to approximate to that sublime calling. Not content with lording it at the village inn, and standing treat to all-comers, he had extended his hospitalities to his own house, where his friends of the wrestling-ring had 'rallied round him,' night after night, with the ready affability of their class. For the first time, the ancient home of the thrifty Harrisons was made the scene of drunken wassail; its rafters, laden no longer with winter store, shook with drunken revelry; and its mistress found herself degraded to the position of a serving-wench at a beer-house. This state of things indeed existed no longer, since all the ready money at her husband's disposal had disappeared; but though contenting himself for the present with running up a score at the *Wrestlers Arms*, he was said to be making arrangements for the sale of the Nook itself. No wonder, then, that Mary Ripson should look pale and haggard, and that when physical ailments were added to her other troubles, she should have become but the ghost of her former self. She accepted with thanks the good things Mrs Woodford brought her; but either her appetite was not equal to them, or when she took them, they did her little good: on the last occasion, indeed, of a visit to Ander, Evelyn thought she had never seen her look so ill. The interview between Mrs Ripson and her aunt had lasted longer than customary, and yet, when they joined her in the kitchen, they each seemed to have something more to say. Mrs Woodford, as usual, on these occasions, looked dissatisfied and severe, and Mary deprecating and obsequious.

'I have gone as far as I can possibly go, mind,' said the former, moving towards the door. 'If the matter was in my own hands, I might perhaps accede even to this extortion; but we wives are not our own masters.'

'That is true indeed, ma'am,' answered Mary, with a tremor in her voice: 'nobody should know that better than I.'

So moved was Evy with the wretchedness of her tone, and with the piteous wreck of her beauty,

that for the first time she held out her hand as she was about to follow her aunt.

'O miss, God bless you for that,' whispered Mary hoarsely. 'I know you despise me, but it is something to feel you do not hate me. Miss Evelyn, dear'—here she hesitated, and for once to her wasted cheek returned the colour that had fled it so long—'I never hear about him; I am not worthy to hear—but how is he looking? Is he happy? Is he well?'

No name was mentioned, but the child felt instantly to whom the question referred.

'He is well, Mary,' returned she gravely; 'but I do not think he is happy.'

'Alas, alas! it is hard that God should punish us both for the fault of one. He has laid his hand heavily upon me, but I would willingly bear more to know that George's burden had been taken off. Would you tell him that, Miss Evy, please?'

'Yes, Mary, I will.'

Mrs Woodford was already seated in the pony-carriage when her niece reached the door, but she exhibited no sign of impatience; on the contrary, she was staring before her as though engaged in the fashionable occupation of unravelling a double acrostic.

'You will see Dr Warton to-night, Mrs Ripson?' inquired she, after a long pause.

'I can't say, ma'am, I'm sure. I think it's very likely.'

'I will take care he comes; for there is not, in my opinion, any time to lose: not a day, not an hour.'

'To say the truth, I don't think there is, ma'am.'

'You have everything you want, I believe?' continued Mrs Woodford reflectively.

'Yes, ma'am, thank you, everything,' returned Mrs Ripson with a sigh—'everything except what money can't buy.'

'Ah, that we can't help, Mrs Ripson,' answered the other curtly. 'Your husband is sure to be at home to-night, I suppose?'

'At some time or another, yes, ma'am.'

'The later the worse, eh, Mrs Ripson?' replied the lady, fixing her cold blue eyes upon the speaker. 'But don't you fret yourself more than you can help. All men are brutes, you may take my word for it, although I own there are women worse than any men. However, upon reflection, I think you need say nothing more to your husband about what we have been talking of to-day.'

'O ma'am, do you really think that?' answered Mary, her own face lit up as when the veil of mist lifts for a moment, and the whole mountain-side brightens without a sun-ray.

'Yes,' answered Mrs Woodford thoughtfully. 'At all events, if you find him obstinate, do not press him, so as to run any risk from his brutality. Good-bye.' As the wheels rolled slowly round, she turned and added: 'I hope I shall not see you to-morrow, Mary.'

'What a strange thing to say!' thought Evelyn, though she made no remark. She was not at all afraid of her aunt, but that lady's manner did not invite inquiry. Nor, as they wound down through the yellowing copse, nor by the forget-me-not bordered lake, nor through the foxglove dell which formed the unfrequented carriage-drive from the main road to Dewbank Hall, did either break the autumn silence.

At the front door stood the doctor's gig, and in the hall the doctor chatting with his host. He

had almost gone away, he said, without waiting for his patient, but since she had arrived, he would ask her a few questions.

'My wife looks very pale this afternoon,' observed Mr Woodford in a low and anxious tone, when the consultation was over; 'is there anything to be apprehended shortly?'

'Nothing; or, at least, certainly not at present,' returned the doctor confidently; 'but I don't think she must take any more drives.'

'I wish that woman from Keswick had come,' continued Mr Woodford nervously. 'I had much rather have employed old Widow Ripson, and been sure of her.'

'There is no cause for anxiety about the matter, my dear sir,' observed the doctor. 'There is plenty of time; and if it was not so, you might still set your mind at ease. You will think nothing of this sort of thing when it has happened half-a-dozen times.'

'Good heavens, how you talk!' urged Mr Woodford with irritation. 'Why, this is the only time that I shall care twopence about it.—Yes, I shall certainly send to Widow Ripson.'

'That is quite out of the question, my dear sir. The widow is safe to be in attendance upon her daughter-in-law at the Nook, who, I think I told you, was threatened with an attack of the same nature. It is not unusual with young matrons, I assure you.' And the huge doctor laughed, and swelled, and purpled, as it was his wont to do when facetious.

'Well, at all events, you won't be out of the way yourself, Warton.—Now stay and dine here to-night, like a good fellow.'

'I can't indeed, Mr Woodford, because I've promised to see old Martin Welsh at Milnthwaite before dusk: a very bad case that indeed, and not a very good one for me. If it was not absolutely necessary, you may depend upon it I should prefer your society over a bottle of claret, to a five-miles' journey upon a cart-track, with a half-sovereign fee at the end of it. But I'll drop in, in the evening, if I possibly can.'

'Do, doctor, do.—And look you,' whispered the Black Squire, 'if all goes well—that is with the child—and it's a boy; mind, if it's a boy, I say, I'll give you a hundred guineas.'

'Well, but if it's a girl?' returned the doctor, laughing, but looking down on his companion's face with serious eagerness too. 'I can't help the sex, you know. What if it's a girl?'

'Well, you'll get five guineas instead of a hundred; and a devilish dear bargain too,' answered Mr Woodford doggedly.

'Very good,' returned the doctor quietly, as he climbed up into his creaking gig. 'Let us hope, for both our sakes, that it will be a boy.'

FERN LEAVES:

SONG OF THE LONDON WORK-GIRL.

GREEN as the emerald glancing in sunbeams,
Graceful as though from the hand of a fairy—
Freeh as if still in the waters of cool streams,
Laving thy plumage fantastic and airy—

Hast thou unfolded thy fan-leaf in valleys?
Thou and the primrose close nestled together!
Or far in the depths of the lone forest alleys,
Besprinkled with russet the bloom of the heather?

Hast thou been waving on blue far-off mountains?
Or drooping thy plumes o'er the rock-roughened dell?
Or flung like a veil over deep springing fountains,
Didst thou change the bright sunbeams to green as
they fell?

Ah, mute as thy leaf is, it yet hath a voice,
Which tells me of scenes that I never may see,
And bids me in spirit look up and rejoice
At the beauty and love that are lavished on thee!

Gloomy and dark though the lot I inherit,
Poverty-bound, like a slave to the oar,
Yet wafted by thee on the wings of the spirit,
Thy haunts by the mountain and stream I explore.

I hear, as I listen, the voice of the rill,
Where thou and thy shade are coquetting for ever,
Beseeching the wavelets in vain to be still,
That leaflet and image may mingle together.

Or I see thee on hills where the heather is sweet,
And all the day long the lark sings in the skies,
Still seeking to lure me, with loving deceit,
From the nest where his mate with her little ones
lies.

Wild-deer are browsing at ease in the covert,
Harebell and daisy buds hide in its shadow—
Breezes are kissing thee fresh from the clover,
And bearing thy seed back again to the meadow.

Ay, and those breezes my forehead are fanning;
Scenting my hair with the breath of the flowers,
And sunbeams unscathed by town-mists are fanning
Cheeks sodden before by the toil of long hours.

Hark to that sound! the work-bell is ringing;
Vanish the mountain, the streamlet, and lea;
Mute is the lark, or I hear not its singing,
And I in my garret gaze sadly on thee.

Yet short as the dream, it shall not be in vain
That it gave me one moment the joys of the free;
When pining and sad beneath poverty's chain,
My soul shall find gladness in gazing on thee.

With thee it shall once more revisit the clover;
Shall sit by the stream as it tenderly sighs,
Still hoping and dreaming, life's work-a-day over,
To soar like the lark, and to sing in the skies.

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